

Strategic Airlift Capability Provides Logistics Support to MH17 Crash Investigation in Ukraine

Tucked away in the farmlands of northwest Hungary is one the best examples of Smart Defense: three C-17 Globemaster III long-range military cargo jets owned and operated by 12 nations, including 10 Allies and two Partners. Pooling and sharing costs, the multinational group formed the Strategic Airlift Capability (SAC) to purchase the aircraft and contributes human resources to the Heavy Airlift Wing (HAW) which operates the aircraft out of Pápa Air Base. Since it began operations in 2009, the HAW has logged over 14,000 flying hours in over 1000 missions. Its latest mission: to provide logistics support to the MH17 crash investigation in Ukraine.



A K-Loader cargo aircraft deck loader vehicle is being loaded on a Strategic Airlift Capability C-17 aircraft. Photo: HAW / Juha Vehokari

On July 31, SAC member the Netherlands tasked the Heavy Airlift Wing to transport a K-Loader vehicle to Kharkiv, Ukraine. The specialized lifter will be used by the Royal Netherlands Air Force and the Australian Airforce to load and offload cargo needed to facilitate the work of crash investigators and forensic

experts. The other SAC nations include NATO members Hungary, Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and the United States; and NATO Partnership for Peace nations Finland and Sweden.

The mission to Ukraine is the most recent example of how SAC member nations can call upon the Heavy Lift Air Wing (HAW) to help fulfill their national and international obligations for assistance and support. For their investment in dollars and personnel, the nations reap the benefits of allocated flight hours that can be used in airlift operations ranging from humanitarian cargo drops to support for training exercises.

As the lead nation assisting in the investigation of the crash of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 and the country that sufferer the highest number of victims in the tragedy, The Netherlands called upon the HAW to provide critical logistics support. The other nations making up the aircraft's multinational crew are also members of Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which encouraged all 57 member nations to support the investigators' efforts.

The commercial aircraft was shot down on July 17 near Donetsk, Ukraine, killing all 298 passengers and crew, including citizens of 11 countries. Nearly two-thirds of the victims were Dutch, with Australia and Malaysia also suffering heavy losses. Technical and forensic investigators from The Netherlands, Australia, Malaysia and regional agencies, in coordination with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), are currently searching for the remains of approximately 80 victims in wreckage spread over eight square miles.